THE GOLDIE MILL

A HISTORY
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A Granddaughter of
JOHN GOLDIE, THE BOTANIST

The founder of The Goldie Mill was John Goldie who was born in Ayrshire, Scotland, in 1793. He was trained in botany and horticulture and became associated with the Botanic Gardens of Glasgow where he met and became a great friend of David Douglas after whom the Douglas Fir was named.

Sir William Jackson Hooker was a professor of botany at Glasgow. In 1817 he encouraged John Goldie to go to Canada "to examine the botanic productions of Upper Canada, and of the States, in the vicinity of the Lakes". For two years Mr. Goldie explored these areas mostly on foot. Amongst his discoveries was a beautiful fern which Sir William named after him Aspidium Goldianum, commonly called the Goldie Fern.

He was so favourably impressed by what he had seen of Canada that he determined to bring his family to this new country. In 1844 Mr. and Mrs. Goldie brought their sons, John and David, and four daughters to a farm near Ayr which was named by them "Greenfield" after a place near their home in Scotland. Two sons, William and James, had preceded him to the New World and settled in the United States in 1842, but later joined the family in Canada.

Goldie started farming and established a small nursery. Exhausting work brought in small returns and cash was hard to come by even at 16% per annum. In 1847 John Jr. and Thomas Fulton, a near neighbour, bought a sawmill and moved it to a site near the farm and close to the present Greenfield dam. A small raceway and dam were built.

In 1848 John Goldie Sr. writes "We have now commenced cutting a raceway from the sawmill dam for a new erection, an oatmeal mill, one of the best paying concerns in the country. We will have hard scraping to get it erected. Samuel Austin from Ayr, an excellent millwright and miller, is to do all the machinery and will ask no pay except board, until it is made by the mill." The sawmill was given up in 1849 because it was not proving profitable and it was decided to build a flour mill in conjunction with the oatmeal mill already planned.

The story of the founding of the first Greenfield Mill is best told by quoting from letters written by John Goldie to his son James in New York State.

July 27, 1849. "I stated in a letter that we were building a mill. The house is up and we are getting ready for the wheel to be put in. It is to be a horizontal one on a total new plan and we are going to put in a run of flour stones and then get another for oatmeal. It will be pre-

"pared so that one or two more runs of stones can be put in if considered proper. John (Jr.) has gotten the wood as part payment of his share of the sawmill. The heaviest concern is the stones which are very dear, but could we get all things set going I think it will pay better than farming."

September 19th, 1849. "We are kept very bare and gotten a good deal in debt in erecting the mill. I must go to Dundas in a few days to procure stones. They will cost $150 and then are only six months erected so it will keep us busy to get it made up in time...We are only getting the flour part at present but must have an oat kiln as soon as possible."

March 13th, 1850. "I had been waiting to see how we were going to do about the mill. It was finished so far some time ago with one run of gristing stones and one for chopping. Our original intention was to have an oatmeal mill in conjunction, but after advising, we have come to the conclusion of erecting bolts for merchant flour, and this will take us all summer. Gristing or country work will not pay as we must have a miller, and wages are high. If we can get anyone to advance cash to buy wheat and keep the mill going day and night, then it would pay well. With a good miller we could get on without any other hired person which would be an advantage. The mill must be ready for flouring immediately after harvest and we have the promise of a commission from a Dundas man. If it does as it ought the debt will soon be paid. Ayr Mill with one run of stones makes about 15-20 barrels of flour per week for work."

July 4th, 1850. "We have been very much disappointed with some of our mill operations and have not gotten it set going yet. We put in a new patent wheel which had a great character, and had all things ready to start about 10 days ago, but our wheel would not do after trial, so that we have been obliged to take it down and commence another which may take about two weeks work. This has annoyed us much besides causing a good deal more expense. John, William and David have been busy day and night for some time, anxious to get the mill started, and have been constantly standing among water which is not agreeable at this season. I hope that our new wheel will do. All inside work is first rate, and there are two run of stones which are very expensive, the flouring run being £40 and the other for chopping £10. These are not paid, and the former must be paid in May..."

July 18th, 1850. "John and William have been constantly engaged about the mill and it will keep them very busy to get it finished for all grinding. The first building is 30 feet by 28 feet and we have another nearly as large. It is not yet finished. John is putting in the machinery (this is the John who founded the Goldie-McCulloch Foundry) and William is doing the common jobs. The chief outlay is for castings which come heavy and have to be taken on credit but the debts will be small compared to the value of the mill when finished. All that we want now is someone to give us a commission, that is supplying us with cash to buy wheat and getting the flour. The common practice is to receive the price of 5 bushels for which a barrel of flour is delivered. The overplus, middlings and bran go for labour and barrel. If kept running we could make at least $5 a day besides expenses, which would soon clear us. We could do with one miller as William will attend as second which will save us $20 a month."

November 20th, 1850. "I intended writing long ago, but always deferred it until I could give you some satisfactory information about the mill. I can now state that we are to have employment during the winter from Jas. Brown who carries to Hamilton. He sells three or four tons every week to the bakers, and what more flour we make will be barreled. From the low price of wheat, 65 cents per bushel, our profits will be but small, besides being beginners. But if we can make good flour, and place it, it will be of importance. All is now about finished in the mill and everything seems to work well."

February 11th, 1852. "I hardly know what to say about the mill as yet. It has been kept constantly going and we have gotten another run of stones put in. We are again grinding for Jas. Brown but have to furnish wheat at 3¢ below Galt price and as the Ayr Mills often give within 1¢ of that we lose 2¢ a bushel. He pays us the price of 5 bushels and we give him a barrel of superfine flour."

The struggle of John Goldie and his sons in the new environment was desperate. There was lack of money, fear of debt, bitterly long hours of hard labour and constant disappointment until the year 1854 when the milling business began to prove profitable and some money was made. And so they all worked from year to year, each one with his or her shoulder to the wheel.

Eventually a larger mill had to be planned to keep up with the increase of business. That meant an increase of water power. On August 5th, 1863, David Goldie, who was taking over more and more responsibility, entered into an agreement with a Hugh McDonald of London to "cut a certain Mill Race". One half of the excavation was to be banked up 4' on each side with a 2' path at the edge of the raceway for a path. It is interesting to note here that the labourers the contractor employed were paid 75¢ a day and boarded themselves. It is believed that most of these men had come across from the U.S.A. to escape conscription in the Civil War. This raceway ran from an enlarged dam to the site of the new mill built in 1865 and still in use (1959) although not for flour milling purposes. The main portion, or that containing the flouring appliances of this model mill, was a 44 x 88 feet solid stone structure two storeys in height. A 44 x 63 feet attachment of similar height was added at the rear for use as a grain storehouse with a capacity of 70,000 bushels. Two run of stones were driven by a turbine water wheel. This was cast at Crombie's foundry from a pattern made by John Goldie Jr. The undershot wheel, sometimes called a flutter wheel, is the kind in which the water runs under and not over, as often depicted in romantic paintings. (See accompanying picture).

In 1880 Greenfield was fitted with machinery to manufacture flour on the new Hungarian roller process system. "This system included "ending stones" corrugated Gatz steel break rolls, and smooth rolls for grinding the middlings, some of porcelain and some of chilled iron. Ten pairs of French buhr-stones were used in the final reduction of middlings to flour" (quotation from the Northwestern Miller of February 3, 1926). The Northwestern Miller also had this to say: "E.W.B. Snider has the honor of having introduced into Canada, (October 20, 1875) if not to all America, the new roller process which has revolutionized the milling industry of a

continent....the transformation of the milling industry from the short process of grinding with millstones to the gradual reduction system of the new roller process". Thus it can be seen that in introducing the new method only 5 years later Mr. Goldie was among the pioneers.

The original building near the dam was used as a stave and heading mill. This was destroyed by fire and replaced by a building for making headings only. Eventually this was abandoned when besswood became scarce and all material for making barrels was brought in from western Ontario and assembled in a cooper shop built on the high ground to the north of the new mill.

1883 was the year of "The Great Flood". It swept away the north end of the dam and the headgates. The mill had to be closed for a time. It was now considered wise to lengthen the dam and raise it a foot or two and put in new headgates. A protection dike was also built from the headgates to the road and this still can be seen quite plainly across the road from Greenfield House. Steam power was instituted to avoid such crises and to augment water power which was inadequate in periods of low water.

John Goldie Sr. in his later life gave up active interest in the business and spent much of his time with his beloved plants and flowers. His death occurred in July 1886 when he was in his 94th year. His son David became proprietor of the Greenfield Mill. In 1889 the capacity of the mill was 400 barrels a day, or a yearly output of about 125,000 barrels. In the transit of the grain and its products involved in this estimate more than 1,000 railway cars were loaded and unloaded annually. The destination of fully nine tenths of the flour was the Maritime Provinces where the trade mark of Goldie Star Flour became famous.

Two storeys of brick were added to the stone mill in the early nineties. The business expanded and two other mills were acquired, one in Galt and one in Highgate. There was a change over to a full Hungarian process and stones were abandoned.

Several of David Goldie's sons worked with their father in carrying on the business. On May 21st, 1894, just before the death of David Goldie on June 27, 1894, the business was incorporated under the Companies Act and became The Goldie Milling Company (Limited). John, George and Herbert carried on with the assistance of Robert Neilson who had come from Scotland in the early days and worked his way up to be Secretary of the Company. He was a wise counselor to the young sons of his great friend David Goldie.

In June, 1910, the mills were sold to the Canadian Cereal and Milling Company Limited. No longer could they be called The Goldie Mills.